

*The Charge of Sedition and Faction against good
Men, especially faithful Ministers, considered
and accounted for.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached in the ABBEY-Church of PAISLEY,

O N

THURSDAY, Sept. 7th. 1758.

At the Ordination of Mr. ARCHIBALD DAVIDSON,
as one of the Ministers of that Church.

To which is subjoined,

The Charge to the Minister, and the Exhortation
to the People.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, A. M.
One of the Ministers of PAISLEY.

Published at the desire of those that heard it.

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On ACTS xvii. 6. last clause.

*These that have turned the world upside down are come
hither also.*

My BRETHREN,

Y O U have had, of late, frequent opportunities of hearing discourses on the ministerial character and office. These subjects, indeed, have, on occasions of this and a similar nature, been so often and so well handled, that it is hard to say any thing on them, which shall not be either bare repetition, or an alteration very much for the worse. I have therefore made choice at this time of a subject somewhat different, but the usefulness of which both to ministers and people may be easily discerned.

A great part of the sacred volume consists of history. And, as the knowledge of past events, and the history of mankind in general, is an improving study; so, there is no object of study more pleasant, or more profitable than that extensive view of the great plan of providence which is exhibited to us in the word of God. There, we have access to observe the power, the wisdom, and the grace of the various revelations of the divine will, given in successive ages, their correspondence one to another, and how well each is suited to the season, and other circumstances of its discovery. Above all, it is useful and delightful to observe, the perfect union and harmony of the whole, and the several striking and distinguishing characters that are to be found on all the works of the one, eternal, and unchangeable God.

This uniformity is in nothing more remarkable, than in the sufferings of good men, and their causes. True

Religion being the same in substance in every age, we may expect to find a very strong likeness in all the real servants of God, however distant the periods in which they make their appearance. A conformity of state also may be expected, as well as a similarity of character. They have the same end in view, they tread in the same path, and therefore must meet with resistance from the same enemies. There was from the beginning, and there will be to the end of the world, a strife and conflict between the righteous and the wicked, between *the seed of the Woman, and the seed of the Serpent*. And, in particular, it is natural to suppose, that slander and calumny will be always one of the weapons used by the enemies of the truth. We have no reason, then, to be surprized, that every good man should have occasion to say with the Psalmist *David*, and with a greater than he, the Son of *David*, *They laid to my charge things that I knew not.*

This was the case with the apostle *Paul* and his companion, in the passage of history of which my text is a part. But the nature of the accusation here brought against them seems to be singular, and to merit particular attention. They were the servants and the ministers of the Prince of peace. Their office was to preach and publish the gospel of peace. Their doctrine was full of meekness and love. They discovered the love of God to men; and, after the example of their Master, they charged men to love one another. They were mean in their outward appearance, and neither possessed, nor claimed any earthly dominion. In one word, they had nothing about them that one would think, could give jealousy to the civil power, that could seem formidable or dangerous to any character or class of men. Yet here they are charged as seditious, as disturbers of the publick peace, as enemies to the government. *These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.----These all do contrary to the decrees of Cesar, saying, That there is another king one Jesus.* What sort of an accusation is this? not only false but improbable. Does not the arch-

arch-enemy, the accuser of the brethren, seem to have failed in his usual skill? Is there the least prospect of success in so groundless a charge?

But what shall we say, if, upon an accurate examination it be found, that the same charge hath been brought against the servants of God in every age? That none hath been advanced with greater boldness, and none with greater success? Nay, perhaps, that it is the single standing charge, from which their enemies have never departed since the beginning of the world, and which, of all others, hath been most readily and most universally believed? In other instances, the reproaches thrown upon the children of God have been opposite, and mutually destructive of each other. Christ himself, when his zeal in his Father's business made him forget to eat bread, was said to be beside himself, and mad. At other times, he was called a cunning deceiver and master of the curious arts. But in this, his enemies, and those of his people, have never varied. And their success has been equal to their malice. They crucified him as an enemy to *Cæsar*, with the title of usurpation written over him; and they have compelled all his disciples after him, to bear his cross, and to groan under the weight of the same unjust and slanderous charge.

There are few subjects more worthy of the serious attention of those who firmly believe the word of God. None which will afford greater occasion to adore the mysterious depth of divine providence, or furnish more instructive lessons to such as desire to hold on with steadiness in the paths of true religion. Above all, this subject may be useful to ministers of the gospel. It will contribute to ascertain the character which they ought to bear; to direct them in their duty; to prepare them for, and fortify them against the trials which it is impossible they can avoid.

In discoursing further on this subject it is proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. By a short historical deduction, chiefly from the holy scriptures, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome

troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.

II. To enquire, and endeavour to point out, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

In the last place, To make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these, viz.

I. By a short historical deduction, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.—It would not be difficult to point out something of this spirit prevailing in the world, from the life of almost every good man, whose name stands upon record, however short and general the account be, that is given of many of them in scripture. But, as much of what might properly enough fall under this head, will be necessary in the illustration of the second; to prevent confusion and repetition, I shall content myself with some leading instances, in very different ages, from the earliest to the latest times.

The first I shall mention is, A passage as extraordinary in its nature, and as singular in its circumstances, as any that history affords. It is the meeting of *Ahab* and *Elijah* in the time of a great famine in the land of *Israel*. *Ahab* that profane prince, had, by his apostacy, and idolatry, brought down the judgment of a righteous God, both on his kingdom, and on his house. We are told, * *That he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him.* He had persecuted the worshippers of the true God with unrelenting violence; and, as it was natural to expect, he hated with uncommon rancour, and distinguished by uncommon severity, all the prophets who continued stedfast in the cause of truth. As many of them as he could lay hold of, he had put to death. He had hunted for *Elijah*, not only through all the kingdom of *Israel*, but through the neighbouring nations, as we find narrated by

Obadiah

* 1 Kings xvi. 33.

Obadiah his principal servant, As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my Lord hath not sent to seek thee : and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they found thee not †. After all this severity on his part, when Elijah, by the command of God, went out to meet him, see the form of his salutation ; And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel ‡ ? To this the prophet makes the following strong and just reply, I have not troubled Israel ; but thou, and thy fathers house, have troubled Israel, in that thou hast forsaken the commandments of the Lord ; and thou hast followed Baalim.

Another instance similar to the former may be found in *Jehosaphat* and *Ahab's* consultation before going out to battle. || *And Jehosaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him ? And the king of Israel said unto Jehosaphat, There is yet one man (Micaiah the son of Imlah) by whom we may enquire of the Lord ; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.* Here, you see, *Micaiah* was the object of hatred and aversion, because he denounced the judgment of God against the king's wickedness. That vengeance which he himself, not only merited, but solicited by his crimes, was attributed to malice in the prophet.

See an instance of a general accusation of this kind against all the worshippers of the true God, by *Haman* in the book of *Esther*. *And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are divers from all people, neither keep they the king's laws ; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them *.*

The prophet *Jeremiah* met with the same treatment at different times. Neither prince, nor priests,
nor

† 1 Kings xviii. 10. ‡ Ibid. ver. 17. || 1 Kings xxii. 7, 8.
* Esther iii. 8.

nor prophets, were able to bear without resentment, the threatnings which he denounced in the name of God. Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets, and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant, and all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord *. -----Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city as you have heard with your ears †. We find him afterwards expressly accused of treachery on the same account. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans ‡.

The prophet Amos is another instance, precisely parallel to the last. Because of his fidelity to God, he was invidiously represented as an enemy to the king. Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: The land is not able to bear all his words ||.

Our blessed Lord and Saviour fell under the same accusation. However plain and artless his carriage, he is called a deceiver of the people. There was much murmuring among the people concerning him, for some said, He is a good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people §. His enemies endeavoured to embroil him with the civil government by this insidious question, Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? And that which brought him at last to the cross was the same pretended crime. And from
thence-

* Jer. xxvi. 8, 9. † Ibid. ver. 11. ‡ Jer. xxxvii. 13.
See also chap. xxxviii. 4. || Amos vii. 10. § John vii. 12.

*thenceforth Pilate sought to release him : But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend : Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar *.*

I shall close this view of the scripture history, with the passage of which my text is a part. The whole crime of the apostle *Paul*, and his companion, was preaching the doctrine of the cross of Christ, his great and darling theme. We are told, he *opened and alledged, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead.* Then the *Jews* to whom this doctrine always was a stumbling block, were *moved with envy*, and endeavoured to enflame the resentment of the idolatrous multitude : They took for their associates the most wicked and profligate, *Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort* : They *set all the city on an uprore* : And as, no doubt, the friends of *Paul* and *Silas* would endeavour to protect them from the injurious assault, their enemies very gravely charge them as the authors of the confusion, both there and elsewhere, *They that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also.*

Having adduced these instances from the holy scriptures, which are liable to no exception, I shall say but little on the subsequent periods of the church. Only in general, the same spirit will be found to have prevailed in every age. Whoever will take the pains to look into the history of the church before the reformation, cannot fail to observe, that when any one, either among the clergy, or laity, was bold enough to reprove the errors in doctrine, or the ambition, luxury, and worldly lives of his contemporaries, he was immediately branded as a factious and disorderly person, and often severely punished as an enemy to the peace of the church.

That this was the case with the first reformers, both at home and abroad, is too well known to need any proof. And we have had still more recent examples of it in both parts of the united kingdom. The noble struggle which many in *England* made, about an hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, still bears the name of the grand rebellion. And it is re-

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markable

* John xix. 12.

markable, that, however just a title they had to stand up for their rights as men and Christians, yet, their doing so at that time, was in a great measure owing to the fury and violence of their enemies, who were, in every respect, the aggressors. A very judicious historian says on this subject, * ‘ That which, upon the whole, was ‘ the great cause of the parliament’s strength, and the ‘ king’s ruin, was, that the debauched rabble through ‘ the land, took all that were called Puritans for their ‘ enemies ; so that if a man did but pray in his family, ‘ or were but heard repeat a sermon, or sing a psalm, ‘ they presently cried out, Rebels, roundheads, and all ‘ their money, and goods that were portable, proved ‘ guilty, how innocent soever they were themselves. ‘ This it was that filled the armies, and garrisons of ‘ the parliament with sober pious men. Thousands ‘ had no mind to meddle with the wars, but greatly ‘ desired to live peaceably at home, when the rage of ‘ soldiers and drunkards would not suffer them.’

And in *Scotland*, after the restoration, though there was no struggle for civil liberty, all who chose to obey God rather than man, either in the substance or circumstances of religious duties, were charged with treason, and suffered as rebels. They were expelled from the church ; yet censured as Schismatics. They were harassed, fined and imprisoned, when living in peace, without any fault but *concerning the law of their God* ; and yet complained of as troublesome. They were banished, intercommuned, and denied the common benefits of life ; and yet, when the extreme rigour of their oppressors compelled them to take up arms in self-defence, they were condemned in form of law, for resisting that government which had denied them its protection.

I forbear to add any more particular examples ; but from the deduction above given, it will plainly appear, that worldly men have been always disposed, first to oppress the children of God, and then to complain of injury from them, that by slander they might vindicate

* Calamy’s Life of Baxter, Chap. IV.

vindicate their oppression. Their slander too, hath still run in the same strain ; Troublers of *Israel*, Deceivers of the people, Enemies to *Cesar*, and Turners of the world upside down, have been the opprobrious titles generally given to the most upright and most faithful men, in every age and country.

We proceed now,

II. In the second place, To enquire, What it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

That there must be something of this kind is very evident. So uniform an effect could not take place without an adequate cause. And, to a serious and attentive observer, I am persuaded it is not difficult to discern. The general cause of this effect is, that, in an equivocal sense, the charge is just. True religion does, indeed, give trouble and uneasiness to wicked men, while they continue such ; and it cannot be supposed but they will deeply resent it. In order to illustrate this a little more fully, I beg your attention to the three following observations.

1. The example of the servants of God, is a continual and sensible reproach, to the contrary conduct of the men of the world. Nothing can preserve peace to any man, but some measure of self-satisfaction. As a deceived heart turns the wicked aside, so the continuance of self-deceit is necessary to his tasting those pleasures of sin in which his mistaken happiness is placed. To reproach his conduct, therefore, is to disturb his dream, and to wound his peace. And as pride, however finely disguised, has the dominion in every unrenewed heart, how offensive must every species of reproof be, to men of this character ? Now, is not the example of every good man, a severe and sensible, though silent, reproof to the wicked ? With whatever specious arguments men may sometimes plead for sin, with whatever false pretences they may often excuse and palliate it to their own minds, when it is brought into one view with true religion, it is not able to bear the comparison. The example of good men to the

wicked is, like the sun upon a weak eye, distressing and painful. It is excellent in itself, but it is offensive to them. If I may speak so, it flashes light upon the conscience, rouses it from a state of insensible security, points its arrows, and sharpens its sting. What else was it that produced the first act of violence that stands upon record, the murder of *Abel* by his brother *Cain*. Of this the apostle *John* speaks in the following terms, *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother : And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

And, as every worldly man's own conscience is thus made troublesome to him by the example of the children of God ; so, it tends to set sinners at variance with one another, and exposes the conduct of each to the censure of the rest. Sin, however universally practised, is yet generally shameful. Conscience though bribed, and comparatively blind in a man's own case, is often just and impartial, at least under far less bias, in the case of others. It is in this way, and in this way alone, that the publick honour and credit of religion is preserved, amidst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. Must not, then, the example of a strict and conscientious person, set in the strongest light the faults of those who act a contrary part, so often as they happen to fall under observation together. Nay, does it not open the eyes of the world upon many lesser blemishes which would otherways escape its notice ? The degree of shame that attends any practice, is always in proportion to the sense which the bulk of mankind have of the evil of it. And this sense cannot, by any mean, be more strengthened, than by an example of what is good ; as deformity never appears so shocking as when compared with perfect beauty. Thus, a truly pious man is, by every instance of his visible conduct, exposing to reproach some one or other, and by consequence provoking their resentment.

It is for this reason that men discover such a proneness to disparage every profession of piety superior to their own. How common is it to ascribe every such

appearance to weakness, or hypocrisy. In the generality of wicked men this is not so properly malice, as self-defence. If they should allow the excellence of such a character, it would be condemning themselves out of their own mouths. Their inward reflection, in all probability, is perfectly similar to that of the *Pharisees*, when Christ asked them, Whether the baptism of *John* was from heaven, or of men? *They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, from heaven, he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?* In the same manner, should any confess the excellence of a conduct opposite to their own, it would be impossible to avoid saying to them, Why do you then so sin against light?

Every one will see, that this must necessarily hold most strongly in the case of those whose office, or whose work, is of a public nature. They are like a city set on an hill. As their character is most conspicuous, it is, by necessary consequence, most useful to the good, and most provoking to the wicked. Faithful ministers of Christ, for instance, are the lights of the world, and, by their piety and diligence, are a standing reproach to the world lying in wickedness. But, in a particular manner, they must be the objects of the hatred and resentment, of those of their own order, who will not follow their steps. This is an evident consequence of the principle above laid down. As their character suffers most by the comparison, their passions must necessarily be most inflamed. Let a minister of Christ be ever so guarded in his speech, ever so inoffensive in his carriage, ever so distant in reality from injuring others; if he is more frequent, or more affectionate in preaching, if he is more assiduous in the duties of his function, this must naturally excite the resentment of the lazy, slothful part of his profession. This, of it self, is injury enough to these who love their worldly ease, and have more pleasure in the possession of their benefice, than the exercise of their office. Is this surprising? Not in the least. His conduct does indeed molest their quiet: It either forces them to
greater

greater diligence, or holds up their real character to light, and exposes them to contempt and scorn.

In order, at once, to confirm and illustrate this truth, be pleased, my brethren, to observe, that the force and malignity of envy, in defaming of characters, is always in proportion to the nearness of the person to whom the character belongs. Distance, either of time or place, greatly abates, if not wholly extinguishes it. Suppose the character of a person drawn, who lived many ages ago, or even at present in a very distant country; suppose him represented as eminent in virtue of every kind, as remarkably diligent, as indefatigably active in doing good; there are few who shew any disposition to call in question the fact, or impute it to sinister motives. But let the same be the apparent character of any man among his contemporaries, and how many are immediately up in arms against him? How implicitly do they believe, and with what pleasure do they spread every idle calumny to his prejudice? How is his piety immediately converted into hypocrisy, his zeal into faction and ill nature, his fervour and diligence into affectation, and love of popularity, and, in a word, every valuable quality into that vice, by which it is most commonly or most artfully counterfeited.

That this difference of judgment is entirely owing to the reason I have assigned, will further appear, if you consider, that so soon as a connection of the same nature happens, by any accidental circumstance, to be established, the same invidious resentment immediately takes place against the most distant characters. What inveterate prejudice do infidels generally show, against the characters of the scripture saints, and those of the fathers of the Christian church, because the establishment of such characters does necessarily and manifestly infer the overthrow of the cause in which they are embarked. In the mean time, the wise men of the heathen nations are suffered to possess, without contradiction, all the reputation which their countrymen in after ages have thought fit to bestow upon them. Nay, sometimes, to serve a certain purpose, their character

rafter is increased and magnified beyond all reasonable bounds. What pains have been taken by those Christians, who patronize the modern inventions and improvements in Theology, to undermine the characters of the most eminent champions of the ancient faith? What would some persons teach us to believe of *Athanasius* and *Augustine* in earlier, *Calvin*, *Luther* and *Melancton* in latter times? Not, that we have not well attested evidence of their piety and integrity, but that, being of different sentiments from their accusers, the excellence of their character is too good a support to their cause*.

2. Another reason why the servants of God are represented as troublesome is, because they will not, and dare not, comply with the sinful commandments of men. In matters merely civil, good men are the most regular citizens, and the most obedient subjects. But, as they have a Master in heaven, no earthly power can constrain them to deny his name, or desert his cause. The reply of *Peter* and *John* to the *Jewish* rulers when they were commanded *Not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus*, was in the following terms, *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you*
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* I take the opportunity here to add, That the principle above laid down, will plainly account for the great and unassaulted reputation, which the monks and retired devotees so long enjoyed in Popish times. It was their reputation, indeed, which upheld for so long a period, that immense load of idolatrous superstition the Romish religion; and it was not lost, till they were grossly corrupted, and convents were become receptacles of the most shameful impurity and lust. These persons were separated from the world. No frequent and, few near comparisons could be made between them and others. Nay, their character was voluntary, and peculiar to themselves, containing no pretence of an obligation upon all others to imitate it; and, therefore, they were suffered to live unenvied. But if any persons of piety towards God, and fidelity to their Master's cause, live in the world, and refuse to be conformed to it, they must expect the same treatment that he met with. This he hath told them himself, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you* * --- *The servant is not greater than the Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also* †.

* John xv. 18.

† Ver 20.

more than unto God, judge ye *. With what invincible constancy and resolution did *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* refuse to bow before *Nebuchadnezzar's* golden image? The case of *Daniel* was perfectly similar, whom even the king's commandment could not restrain from prayer to God.

When good men are unhappily brought into these circumstances, their conduct is an apparent contradiction to authority. How ready are lordly and oppressive tyrants to stile it obstinacy and pride? And when are there wanting slavish and submissive flatterers near every inferior tribunal, to aggravate the crime, and to cry, *If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend?* It is not to be imagined, indeed, but such as are strangers to true religion must be greatly provoked at those who will not comply implicitly with their commands. There is a remarkable passage in a letter of *Pliny* the younger, to the emperor *Trajan*, which plainly points out the sentiments entertained by many on this subject. He was a man in other matters abundantly humane, and yet hear his own account of his treatment of the Christians when brought to his tribunal. 'I asked them if they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them again threatening punishment. If they persisted, I commanded them to be executed; for I did not at all doubt but, whatever their confession was, their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished.'

There is a love of dominion natural to all men, which is under no controul or restraint in those who are void of religion. This must naturally dispose them to carry on their schemes, and to insist on having them universally complied with. It frets and provokes them, therefore, to find any who will not be subservient to their pleasures. A refusal to obey, on a principle of conscience, is expressly setting bounds to their authority, and saying, *Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further.* How few are able to bear this with patience, the history of the world in every age is one continued proof.

Such

* Acts iv. 19.

Such refusals, also, do always reflect some dishonour upon the measures to which they stand in opposition. Whatever any person refuses to do, he, as far as in him lies, represents as wrong and sinful ; and, in some respects, unworthy or unfit to be done. Thus it comes to be considered not only as withdrawing his own allegiance, but as corrupting and seducing others. And, no doubt, it tends to draw the attention of the world to the disputed command, and makes some, perhaps, sift and examine what they had before blindly gone into without suspicion. Hence it naturally follows, that, whenever such interference happens between human and divine authority, good men must be considered as disorderly and troublesome ; and those of them of all others most troublesome, who with the greatest constancy adhere to their duty, or who, with the greatest honesty and boldness, resist and oppose corrupt measures.

It is less surprising to find instances of this between heathen and Christian, between the professing servants and the open enemies of the true God. But, it is astonishing to think, how often the same thing has happened between Christian and Christian, who ought to have been better acquainted with the rights of conscience, the measures of submission and the duty of forbearance. Not only all the persecutions, but many, if not most, of the schisms and divisions that have fallen out in the Christian church, have arisen from the rigorous impositions of usurped authority. Unjust authority is the very essence of Popery. The church of *Rome* has expressly claimed a power of making laws to bind the conscience, distinct from the laws of God ; and severely punishes all who call this authority in question. Nor hath this been confined to them : Protestant churches, though their separation is founded upon the very contrary principle, have yet often in practice acted in the same arbitrary manner. They insist upon obedience to all their appointments, however sinful in the judgment of the subject : and, as a good man will not comply in such cases, how often doth it happen, that,

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after they have expelled him from their society, stript him of his office, and robbed him of his maintenance, they also cast out his name as evil, loudly charge him as seditious and troublesome, and the author of all that confusion which their own tyranny occasions.

3. One other reason why the servants of God are accused as troublesome, is, because they are, in many instances, obliged, to bear testimony against the sins of others, and openly to reprove them. Reproof is plainly, of all others, the greatest offence and provocation of the proud, and draws down their heaviest resentment : And yet it is often unavoidable. There are some cases in which every Christian without exception, must feel the constraint of this divine law, *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him* *. Some sins are so flagrant in their nature that, even to witness them with silence would imply some participation of the guilt. In such cases it is the glory of the poorest and meanest servant of God, to resent the dishonour that is done to his name, and reprove the most exalted sinner.

But this duty, and the odium arising from it, falls most frequently to the share of the prophets and ministers of God, who have received a commission to speak in his name, and to plead his cause. The faithful discharge of their duty includes in it plainness and boldness in reproofing sin of every kind. They must assert and maintain the truth, and point out the errors opposite to it, with all their guilty fruits, and all their dreadful consequences. How offensive this to human pride ? It must certainly either convince or provoke, reform or inflame. When righteous Lot says, in the mildest terms, to the lustful Sodomites, *I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly*, how fierce is the answer ? *And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge* †.

How many martyrs to truth have there been since the world began ? Without mentioning those in the Old

* Lev. xix. 17.

† Gen. xix. 9.

Old Testament, you see, *John* the baptist lost his life by reproving the incestuous adultery of *Herod* and *Herodias*. Our blessed Saviour gives the following account of the hatred of the world to him, and the contrary reception it gave to his temporising brethren, *The world cannot hate you ; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil*. By consulting the history of the gospel you will find, that what gave rise to the conspiracy of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* against him, was his dragging off the mask under which they lay concealed, and discovering the errors of their doctrine, and the licentiousness of their practice. When they perceived that he spake against them,----they took counsel against him to put him to death ; and accomplished it so soon as they could do it with safety. But there cannot be a better example, or indeed, a more lively and well drawn picture of the effect of plain and just reproof, than in the case of *Stephen* when pleading his cause before the *Jewish* rulers, *Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the holy Ghost ; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the just One ; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.-----When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth**. It is plainly for this reason that the apostles, in their prayers for assistance, do almost constantly ask, that they may be endued with a proper degree of boldness and resolution, *And now, Lord, behold their threatnings ; and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word* †. Many other prayers are to be found in the apostolic writings, which run in the same strain ‡.

It is very natural for every one, at this distance, to imagine, that he could have been in no danger of making such an obstinate resistance to the truth, or persecuting, with such implacable enmity, those who

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* Acts vii. 51, 52, 54.

§ Acts iv. 29.

† See Eph. 6. 19. 2 Thess. iii. 2.

espoused it. But, my brethren, all worldly men, in every age, have still the same abhorrence of the faithful servants of God ; the same impatience of reproof, when it touches themselves. Our Saviour draws their character with great beauty, in speaking to the *Pharisees*; *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites, because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous ; and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets †.* It is very delicately hinted in this last verse, that they were of the same nature, that they grew, as it were, upon the same stock, and therefore it might be expected they would bring forth the same fruit. I cannot but here mention a remark of a very eminent writer, upon this passage ; ‘ That all nations partake much of this disposition of the *Jews*, to honour the dead saints, and ‘ persecute the living *.’

I have taken notice above, that, in every period of the church, the most faithful of the servants and ministers of God, have, in fact, been counted troublesome by corrupt and worldly men. The same passages of history constantly shew, that this has arisen chiefly, from their attempts to stem the tide of prevailing vice ; from their boldness and faithfulness in reproofing fashionable crimes. In the twelfth century *Arnulphus* a devout man, and excellent preacher, speaks thus to the clergy, ‘ I know that you seek my life, and will ‘ shortly kill me ; But why ? I speak the truth to ‘ you, I reprehend your pride and haughtiness, avarice ‘ and luxury, therefore I please you not †.’ And in the fourteenth century, an ancient writer speaks of the court of *Rome* in the following terms, ‘ For what ‘ can you conceive will happen where virtue was long ‘ ago extinct and buried ? There surely truth is the ‘ highest crime, and of itself sufficient to procure the ‘ hatred

† Matth. xxiii. 29, 30, 31.

* Tillotson.

† Whitby's Appendix to his Book on Host-worship.

' hatred of many. For how can we expect but that
 ' should happen, where a true word cannot be spoken
 ' without a great reproach, where the worst of men
 ' are promoted,----where simplicity is esteemed mad-
 ' nefs,----where good men are rendered ridiculous, in-
 ' somuch that now scarce any of them doth appear to
 ' be laughed at. These few things truth itself hath
 ' dared to speak, whence you may gather what you
 ' are to think of many others, which fear doth force
 ' me to conceal.† It is unnecessary to cite many
 passages to this purpose; I shall, therefore, conclude this
 head with the following just reflection of the pious,
 diligent and catholick Mr. *Baxter*, ' I see there is no
 ' help for it, but we must offend wicked men. It is
 ' impossible to avoid it, but either by our silence, or
 ' their patience. Silent we cannot be, because the
 ' word of God commands us to speak, and patient
 ' they cannot be, because sin has the dominion in
 ' their hearts.'

We now proceed in the last place, to make some
 practical improvement of what has been said. And,

In the first place, You may learn from what has
 been said upon this subject, the just and proper answer
 to an objection against the gospel, much insisted on by
 its enemies, *viz.* That it has introduced persecution for
 conscience sake, with which the world was in a great
 measure unacquainted before. There are few subjects,
 on which infidels enlarge with greater pleasure, than
 the cruel hatred and animosity that has prevailed; the
 bloody wars that have been carried on; nay, the savage
 and inhuman massacres that have been perpetrated on
 a religious account, since the publication of the gospel.
 I think this objection is but seldom answered as might
 be. It is usually, indeed, and justly observed, that
 whatever may have been done by those professing
 the gospel, there is no countenance given in it to
 such a spirit and practice. But the objection is not
 wholly removed, while infidels are allowed still to con-
 tend,

† Petrarch's Ep.

tend, as if it served their own cause, that persecution has been its constant attendant and inseparable effect. We ought, therefore, to wrest this argument out of their hands, and first to produce this fact as an accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction; *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household* *.

Having gone thus far, we have reason to contend that the disciples of Christ have always suffered, and never inflicted the injury, tho' they have been often obliged to bear the blame. The multitude of heathen religions, tho' not always, yet did generally agree together: and well they might, for they were all from the same author. None of them, however, could agree with the gospel: for this plain reason, that *no lie is of the truth*. But from what quarter did the violence proceed? Did not the dreadful persecutions against the Christians, in the three first centuries, proceed from the Heathens? Did the Christians commit any other crime against them, than pointing out the sin and danger of their idolatrous worship, and immoral practices? Was not this alone sufficient to raise a cry against them, as turning the world upside down. And in all the subsequent persecutions among professing Christians, was it any thing else than the proud violent and worldly spirit of those who made a gain of godliness, oppressing the few real believers of every denomination? There is an antichristian spirit in every church that shews itself in persecution, in a greater or lesser degree. But there can be nothing more unjust than to attribute the persecution of Christ's disciples by his enemies and theirs, to the spirit of his religion.

Is it then boldly affirmed by some, that the Christian is the only religion in the world that leads to persecution? I answer, On the contrary, It is the only religion that has suffered persecution from all its numerous

* Matth. x. 34, 35, 36.

merous enemies : And, at the same time, it is the only religion in the world that requires, and points out the obligation, of mutual forbearance, and makes the just and proper division, between the things that are *Cæsars*, and the things that are Gods. That it is often blamed as persecuting others, is a proof and illustration of this truth. For all is of a piece, and the false accusation, arises from the source which I have opened up above, and confirmed by examples adduced from history. To these I shall now only add one observation, which comes in with peculiar propriety here ; That innumerable instances may be given, in which those very persons who were ready to lift the secular arm against good men, have loudly complained of the exercise of discipline, and the censures of the church upon their crimes. These they often stile persecution, and always affirm to flow from a persecuting spirit. But, as they are often necessary, so, even when they are unjustly applied, it is plain from their very nature, that if they be groundless, they must be perfectly harmless.

Thus the state of the world is so far from being an objection against, that it is a proof of the truth of the gospel. True Christians have suffered from every quarter ; from within and from without ; from open enemies and from false brethren. They have been first persecuted, and then slandered as persecuting others ; nay, obliged to bear the odium of that very oppression under which they groaned. Of all this they are fairly forewarned by their Saviour, who says, *Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.* They are exposed to injurious treatment from many, and may expect to suffer without cause. None however make so cruel a havock as those wolves who put on sheeps clothing ; and yet, of all their cruelty, the poor suffering sheep must bear the blame.

2. From what has been said, you may see the guilt and danger of those who falsely accuse the children of God. Perhaps you may be ready wholly to refuse the charge, and to say, Where is the necessity, where is the

propriety

propriety of this at present? Have we not all civil and religious liberty? and are not religion and its ministers in esteem and repute. I answer, It is never unnecessary. The fault I complain of is no part of the peculiar degeneracy of this age. It is not confined to any one age, country, or profession, but is common to them all: and we would but deceive ourselves should we fondly fancy we are exempted from it. Nay, our present state as a church and nation, seems to render such a warning peculiarly seasonable. We have long enjoyed outward peace. In every other country this has introduced a worldly spirit, ambition, luxury and sloth. And is there no vestige of these characters among us now? Who will pretend it? Are there not some who cannot endure such strictness as is inconsistent with conformity to the gay and fashionable world. Do not all such, incline to charge every profession of piety with hypocrisy? Do they not consider every faithful reprover, as an enemy to their peace? Do they not hear with secret pleasure, and spread with apparent triumph, every report, to the prejudice of such troublers of *Israel*?

This then is the character; and as many of you as conscience charges with the guilt, may see your danger. You may see whose cause you plead, and whose reward you shall share. What an inward enmity do you discover against the spirit and power of true religion? You are of the number of those who *Hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest your deeds should be reprov'd.* You are of the number of those who *say to the seers, See not, and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, and prophesy deceit.* You will not endure sound doctrine, but love and follow only that which will exercise and amuse your imagination and fancy, sooth and gratify your pride and vanity, or make and keep you at peace with yourselves. You are asleep in security, and will avoid every thing that may tend to disturb or interrupt your dangerous repose. And how hurtful is your conduct to others? You blast the characters and lessen the usefulness of the ministers of Christ. You bring an evil report

port upon the truth, by rendering them odious or contemptible who bear it.—And if we, my brethren, who are ministers of the gospel, imitate this example, in any measure, if we discover a suspicion and jealousy, or an aversion and hatred, at all who are more diligent than ourselves, what dishonour must fall upon our profession, what a hinderance is it to the edification of others, and what guilt do we bring upon our own souls.

3. If this has been the constant lot of all the servants of God, to be accused as seditious and troublesome, let every cautious person beware of being misled by the persecuting cry. I ask any man who is conversant in the world, if he hath not, in many instances been insensibly taught to form a hateful idea, or to entertain a despicable opinion of many ministers, without the least personal knowledge, the least satisfying evidence or proof. What is the reason? Why he hath been told, that they are proud, hypocritical, factious, censorious, troublesome men. Well. The thing is possible, no doubt. But, in the mean time, it is far from being certain; and this sort of character industriously propagated, is no evidence of it at all, or rather is a presumption of the contrary. You see, from the instances produced above, that this is a reproach perpetually thrown upon the most upright and faithful of the servants of God; that it may very naturally arise from their fidelity itself; and that it cannot be avoided by those who resist the corrupt measures, who reprove the publick vices, or who shame the criminal laziness, and negligence of others. An ignorant, vitious, worthless minister is envied by no body. He is, therefore, quite safe from all the poison'd arrows which fly from that quarter. He is rather a foil to many to set off and illustrate their own comparative excellence. He is, therefore, often pardoned, pitied, and protected. Whereas a faithful minister, who openly dares to bear witness against the apostacy of others, is traduced and slandered, loaded with imaginary crimes, and often falls a martyr to the sinking cause of truth and righteousness.

4. Since the world is so prone to receive the accusation of faction against the children of God, let them be careful to give no real ground for it. Unjust calumny has sometimes the contrary effect. When men find, that it is impossible to please a capricious world, or wholly to escape slander, they are apt to give up all solicitude upon that head, and take no further pains to avoid suspected appearances. This I take to be, precisely, what the scripture calls being *overcome of evil*. But how much better is it to *overcome evil with good*? Let us, as often as possible, confute the accusation by an unblameable carriage; and when we must suffer, let us be careful that we suffer, not as evil doers, but for well doing. For this purpose I would humbly offer to ministers the two following directions, which I esteem of great moment.

(1.) Let all our zeal for the glory of God be conducted not only with steadiness, but with meekness. Let us ever remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let our language be always strictly guarded, and free from expressions of rage and fury. If we are faithful to our duty, it will sufficiently provoke sinners, we need not add to it by any mixture of human passion. What noble and effectual principles are we furnished with in scripture, for avoiding every dangerous extreme? Love to God, and love to man, make up the sum of practical religion. These are the immediate fruits of faith, and all the truths of the gospel tend to strengthen and improve them. And as love to God produces indignation against sin, resolution and boldness in opposing it; so, love to man will naturally produce the deepest compassion for the miserable state of every enemy of God, and prevent firmness from degenerating into violence.

(2.) The other direction I would offer upon this subject, is, that ministers take care to avoid officiously intermeddling in civil matters. A minister should be separated and set apart for his own work; he should be consecrated to his office. It is little glory to him to be eminently skilled in any other science, except
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such as may be handmaids to Theology, and are by him habitually turned into a divine channel. Ministers giving themselves to worldly employments, has been commonly of bad fame ; and, where there is a sufficient provision made for their maintenance, seems to be an unjust alienation of their time and talents. But it is still more sinful and dangerous, for them to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrate. When our blessed Saviour says, *My kingdom is not of this world*, he plainly intimates to his disciples, that they have no title to intermeddle with state affairs. Nay, he expressly warns them against a lordly and arbitrary dominion, even in their own proper sphere. *The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so : But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger ; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve**. I cannot help mentioning, here, that this is one of the things, for which our worthy ancestors of the church of *Scotland* (now despised by many) deserve the highest commendation. It was an invariable principle with them, to be against the civil power and places of kirkmen. And surely, if ministers confine themselves entirely to their own proper duty, they will be much less liable to exception than otherwise. They may, then, warrantably use the greatest fidelity in reproving, and the greatest strictness in discipline ; and though the wicked slander and oppose them, the good will defend them, and God will support them.

5. In the last place, Since the charge of faction and sedition has been always brought against faithful ministers, let us learn to bear it with patience, and never dissemble the truth, or depart, in any measure, from our duty, in order to avoid it. A person of a generous mind feels a wound in his reputation more deeply, than almost any other injury. We are still apt fondly to flatter ourselves, that as religion is

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* Luke xxii. 25, 26.

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truly amiable in itself, and ought to make no enemies, that, therefore, we shall have none. Some are very apt to omit, or slightly to perform, several parts of their duty, through that *fear of man that bringeth a snare*. They are unwilling to forego the hope, that by certain prudent compliances they will conciliate and preserve the favour of every man and every party. But the expectation is wholly vain. The experience of many ages hath proved it so. Let us, therefore, bear with patience the false accusation. It hath been the lot of the best and worthiest men in every age. It was the lot of our blessed Master, and shall we refuse to bear his cross? Is it not *enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant that he be as his Lord?* The triumph of sinners is but very short. In a little time all earthly relations shall be dissolved. Then high and low, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. He shall *render to every one according to his deeds*. There the great and noble shall find no partial favour; there the poor and mean shall not escape observation; and there the lying slanderer shall be put to eternal silence. He shall openly acknowledge every faithful servant, and *bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day*.

T H E E N D.

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The CHARGE.

S I R,

AS you are now ordained a minister of Christ, and have received the charge of this congregation, I hope you will bear with me a little, while I offer you a few advices as to the discharge of your important trust. And, I cannot help beginning by congratulating you on the unanimous call you have received from this people. However despised by some, I count it a most happy circumstance both for you and them. It introduces you with great advantage. It gives you a fair and impartial hearing ; and, if you do not preserve their esteem and love, it will probably be, in a great measure, owing to yourself.

I must first of all beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to be strict and frequent, in enquiring into the truth and reality of religion in your own soul. Personal religion is the foundation of all relative duties. They can scarcely be performed in any tolerable measure without it. It is equally necessary to your usefulness, and to your comfort. It is a difficult thing, and it is a dreadful thing, to preach an unknown saviour. Examine, therefore, whether you are *born again* ; whether you have *passed from death to life* ; whether you are united to Christ by faith, whether you know by experience, the difference between a state of nature, and a state of grace, or not. While I speak this, I assure you, I do not mean it, and I hope none will interpret it, as any reflection against, or implying any suspicion of you, who have given me no cause. I speak it from a deep impression of its importance to us all. How miserable a case is it, to have it as our business to bring others to the kingdom of heaven, and be ourselves at last thrust out. A minister is as much liable to self-deceit as any other, and in some respects more so. We are in danger of
thinking

thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of prophane sinners. We may also mistake our frequent thinking and speaking of *the things of God*, in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion in ourselves. Nay, we are in danger of mistaking those gifts, with which God furnisheth us for the benefit of his own people, for the fruits of the Spirit, and gracious dispositions in our own hearts. Maintain, therefore, a holy jealousy over yourself. *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* And, if you save your own soul, you will probably carry many others with you to a better world; and be able to say, after the example of Christ, *Behold I, and the children whom God hath given me.*

As to the duties of your office, see that you preach the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of Christ. Preach Christ crucified, who is *the way, and the truth, and the life*; and without whom *no man can go unto the Father*. You will never be able to make men truly good, till you convince them of their lost state by nature; and, thence, make them see the necessity of justification by the free grace of God, thro' the imputed righteousness of Christ. If you would know what place Christ ought to hold in your preaching and scheme of doctrine, observe what room he fills in the oracles of truth. To the cross of Christ give all the prophets witness. The cross of Christ is the sum and substance of the New Testament. The cross of Christ is the Christian's hope. The cross of Christ is the Christian's glory. You may see, by a serious perusal of the New Testament, that the sacred writers largely illustrate the several parts of his character and office, and seem with pleasure to embrace every opportunity of speaking to his praise. They show how much we are to depend upon him for strength in the discharge of our duty; and enforce all their exhortations by motives drawn from what he hath done,

done, and is still doing, for his church and people. You will soon find from experience, that no cold reasonings on the nature and beauty of virtue, can have such influence in mortifying corrupt affections, as a believing view of a pierced Saviour. For this very reason many detest the doctrine of the cross. It gives a mortal blow to every darling lust. It gives such a view of the holiness and justice of God, as is intolerable to all those who cannot think of breaking their attachment to sin and vanity.

There is one particular reason why I have mentioned this at present, and insisted on it at some length. It is ordinary to meet with serious persons who complain much, that from many pulpits they hear little or nothing of the doctrine of the grace of God ; that the grand and leading truths of the gospel are either flatly contradicted, or kept entirely out of view, and something else substituted in their place. I am far from saying that this is indeed the case. On the contrary, I tremble to think that it should be but barely possible, for all these doctrines are clearly contained in the *Confession of Faith*, which every minister in *Scotland* has subscribed. If, therefore, there be any one among us, who doth not preach the doctrine of original sin, of Christ's imputed righteousness, justification by free grace, the necessity of regeneration, and the operations of the Spirit, he is guilty of perjury of the worst kind, for which I know no excuse. Such a person is not only chargeable with departing from the faith, but with an absolute prostitution of conscience, and a whole life of hypocrisy and deceit. I am indeed entirely at a loss how to account for this apprehension in the people, of a difference in doctrine ; but, as there certainly is such an apprehension, I think I cannot discharge my duty on this occasion, without exhorting you to be clear and explicate upon these heads. The truth is, they are of so general consequence, and have so necessary a connexion with every other part of religion, that, be the subject what it will, where they are firmly believed, I should imagine

gine the manner of thinking and speaking would be such, as to leave no jealousy of an intended omission.

This leads me to exhort you, to preach plainly, or in a way that may be level to the capacities of the hearers, both as to sentiment and expression. God forbid, that I should desire you to rush into a pulpit without preparation, to preach in a disorderly method, or in a mean, slovenly, or indecent stile. All pains should be taken to seek out fit and *acceptable words*. But there cannot be a greater absurdity in speaking to a multitude of common people, than to discourse in such a stiff and abstract way, as it is plainly impossible for them to comprehend. Nor is it any less absurdity to dress up a harangue with excessive elegance, and a vain, ornamented foppery of stile. Some discourses may very well be likened to painted windows, which, with fine colours upon themselves, keep out the light, and make the house comfortable and dark. Such conduct is ordinarily followed by those who would willingly recommend themselves to persons of better taste; but it must evidently render them contemptible to every person of sound judgment. However, it is much worse than absurd, for it is very wicked, when the everlasting salvation of sinners is at stake, to speak in such a manner as they cannot understand, or such as tends only to amuse their fancy, and never can reach their hearts. If we would know what is a proper and just manner of stile and composition in preaching, let us consider how any man would speak, if he was on trial for his own life. Would he not speak with great plainness, earnestness and force? And is not the salvation of souls of infinitely more moment than any man's life? And should it not, if we believe the scriptures, be more regarded by every faithful minister?

You must also take care to preach experimentally and particularly. You will soon find that this is the only profitable way of preaching, and that, unless you apply general truths to the several classes and characters in your audience, they will make but a sorry improvement of

of the best instruction. The ignorant cannot, and the wiser will not apply them to themselves. Besides, the general way is not only useless, but pernicious and hurtful. Suppose I should make an encomium on the wise, just, and gracious government of God over his rational creation, and observe what reason all have to rejoice under his administration. Should I say so to this audience without distinction, it would be to many a dangerous and stupifying poison. A just and holy God is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity. Those who are still in their sins, should tremble to think of the government of God.

Besides publick preaching, you must be diligent among your people *from house to house*. You must not neglect family instruction, and personal admonition or reproof. This is, if not the most useful part of a minister's work, at least absolutely necessary to the success of his preaching. It is also by far the most laborious part, from which slothful men are most apt to excuse themselves. A man may gratify his vanity by preaching, and publick performances; or, the neglect being visible, he may be compelled to regularity by fear of reproach or prosecution. But diligence in private, can scarcely arise from any thing but a sense of duty, and of the presence and observation of God.

The exercise of discipline is another part of your duty which must not be omitted. It is of very great moment to the interest of religion. It is a saying of one of the first reformers, 'They that desire to banish discipline, desire to banish Christ from his church.' There must needs be offences in the Christian church. But when discipline is neglected, then the offence becomes unspeakably more dangerous, especially to the young and weak. It makes them think lightly of the character and privileges of a Christian, when there is either a promiscuous admission to church-communion, or when openly wicked persons are suffered to continue without censure. When you come to instruct young persons, in order to renewing

their baptismal engagements in the Lord's supper ; or, if ever you have occasion to instruct a heathen in order to baptism, I can assure you from experience, you will find the unhappy effect of the low state of discipline among us. It will immediately strike yourself, and these Catechumens will soon betray, by their discourse, how hard it is to have a just sense of the sanctity of the Christian character, while so many profane persons are suffered to be called Christians ; and not a few whose conduct is very exceptionable, continue to be admitted at stated times, to the seals of God's covenant.

How inexcusable are we in this neglect ? If the first Christians, without the help or sanction of an establishment, kept so strict a discipline, what might we do, who have the countenance and approbation of the civil power. In discipline then, be strict, regular, and impartial. Especially be impartial. It is commonly want of impartiality, that makes us fail in strictness. You will have many enemies to impartiality in discipline. You will have the great and wealthy, many of whom, though they live in open defiance of the laws and ordinances of Christ, yet will be much offended, and complain of it as a grievous injury, if by a judicial sentence you deprive them of his name. Nay, you will find in every congregation some professing piety, who, though they are well pleased with, and commend the strict exercise of discipline in the case of others, yet when it comes to touch themselves, or their own relations, will use many arts to evade it. But, if you be firm and unbiassed in so good a cause, it will have a sensible effect.

This leads me to exhort you in the whole of your work, public and private, to beware of the sin of man-pleasing. I do not say, Beware of popularity : Because, in the sense to which common language hath confined that word, it is but one half of the snare. Besides, in propriety of speech, popularity should signify only being accepted and beloved, which in itself is neither duty nor sin, but a blessing. Man-pleasing

pleasing signifies, in scripture, having this as the end and motive of our actions, rather than being acceptable to God. You ought, indeed, for edification, to avoid displeasing any without necessity. But as in this, so in every other thing, you should have a far higher principle, than merely courting the favour either of great or small, good or bad. It is, doubtless, a mean and despicable principle, to act only with a view of gaining the applause of the vulgar and ignorant. But I have often wondered, how some should so boldly and uncharitably lay this to the charge of their brethren, without considering how easy it is, with at least equal justice, to presume that they are under the influence, and acting with a view to please the great. I am sure, there is a much stronger temptation to this than to the former. And, if I am not mistaken, fawning and servility hath been the road, in which ambitious and corrupt churchmen have travelled to preferment, in every age. The truth is, they are equally detestable in the sight of God. But the last is much more destructive to the interest of religion than the first. The favour of the multitude can scarcely be obtained, without either the truth, or the appearance of piety; but the favour of the great is often obtained by silence and suffering them in their crimes, being assistant in their pleasures, or subservient to their political designs. To deliver you, Sir, from both, remember the condition on which you hold your office. *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel: Therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: The same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand**. Forget, then, the foolish accusations of popularity or vanity; and consider, that your people are daily carried to their graves, and you must give an account of every soul that perishes through your neglect.

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* Ezek. iii. 17, 18.

To conclude, Be much in earnest prayer to God, that he would fit you for your work, and crown your labours with success. Prayer is absolutely necessary to the steadfastness and growth of every believer, and especially to a minister. If you believe the gospel, you will believe, that *every good gift cometh from above*; that God only can make you an able and useful pastor; and this will make you importunate with him for a plentiful measure of the holy Spirit to fit you for his service. And I desire to join in praying, that God for Christ's sake, would make you an *able minister of the New Testament*,---and help you to preach the gospel, not with *the wisdom of words*,---but with *the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*.

EXHOR.

EXHORTATION TO THE PEOPLE.

My BRETHREN,

YOU have heard the charge given to your minister. Are there, then, so many duties incumbent on him, by his standing in the relation of a pastor to you? Is not the relation mutual? And are there not several correspondent duties incumbent on you as his people? I beg your patience while I put you in mind of a few of the most important and necessary.

In the first place, It is evidently your duty diligently to attend upon his ministry. It is plainly impossible that you can profit by him, if you do not hear him. I am sorry that there are many in these days, who pour contempt upon the ordinances of Christ's institution. But, in particular, there hath been, of late, a great and remarkable desertion of public worship, by those of higher rank. There is a happy opportunity in this case to put all such among you in mind, that having subscribed a call to their minister, they stand bound by consent to attend upon him. Is it not surprising to think, that any should forget the terms in which that invitation runs, You intreat him 'To take the charge of your souls, and promise him all due obedience and submission in the Lord.' Can a man honestly subscribe this, who seldom comes within the walls of any church? One would be counted infamous in the world, who should act in the face of a signed obligation, in any other matter, or who even should falsify a solemn promise. And, is it less criminal, because it relates to religion, and the service of God? It is, indeed, seldom repented or punished by men, because the offence is not immediately against them, but it remains to be punished by that righteous God, *To whom vengeance belongs,---and who will not be mocked.*

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In the next place, My brethren, let me intreat you to be tender of the character of your minister, and of ministers in general. As their office makes the guilt of their sins great, and as a stain on their character is most hurtful to religion, on both accounts, you ought not rashly to receive an accusation against them.

I do not mean to ask indulgence to the unworthy, I give them up freely to that reproach and contempt which thy justly deserve. But let it fall upon the person, and not upon the office. Do not transfer the faults of particulars to the whole order. It is easy to observe the different reception, which the faults or miscarriages of ministers meet with, from persons differently disposed. The good are affected with grief and concern for the offence, or filled with zeal and indignation against the sinner. But loose and careless persons disparage the profession, and bless themselves in their own uniformity, and consistency of character. You may spare your reflections, 'That ministers are but men, ministers are but like other men,' and the like, when, I assure you, we deny it not. We have all the same great interest at stake. We often speak the more earnestly to you, lest, while we preach the gospel to others, we ourselves should be castaways; and many times describe the workings of a deceitful, wandering, slothful, worldly mind, by taking the copy from our own.

It falls very properly in my way on this occasion, to take notice of a reproach thrown upon ministers, by the mistake or perversion of two of the questions usually put at an ordination, and which you have just heard put to your minister. They are supposed by many to be such as no man can answer with truth, and so quite improper to be put at all. The first of them is in the following terms, 'Are not zeal for the honour of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving souls, your great motives, and chief inducements, to enter into the function of the holy ministry, and not worldly designs and interests?' This is maliciously interpreted to suppose, that a minister in accepting of a fixed charge, hath no view or intention, primary or secondary,

secondary, of being provided of a maintenance. This would be both unnatural and unreasonable. *They that serve at the altar, must live by the altar.* The plain meaning is, That the great motives of a minister, in consecrating himself to this employment, and accepting the particular station assigned him, ought to be the honour of God, and interest of religion, as expressed above. And, surely, that this should be the case, hath nothing in it incredible in our country, the provision for the ministry not being so large, but a man of tolerable abilities hath a much greater hazard of rising to wealth and dignity in many other employments. But alas! how ignorant are they who cavil at this question? Do they not know that every Christian is bound, habitually, and supremely to regard the glory of God in all his actions. This is not peculiar to ministers, except in so far as they ought to be exemplary in every thing. Wo, to every man in this assembly, be his employment what it will, if he does not habitually point his whole actions at the glory of God. *Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies, and your spirits, which are Gods*.*

The other question is this, 'Have you used any undue methods by yourself, or others, in procuring this call?' It is impossible to find fault with this question, but by leaving out the word, undue. And, indeed, it is so far from being wrong, that there would be no harm if it were more particularly explained. It was probably intended to discourage all brigueing and sollicitation, other than a man's real character does for itself, or the free unbiaſſed judgment of others, inclines them to do in his behalf. I apprehend it does reach a reproof to all those, who either promote or hinder settlements, from political connections, or in expectation of temporal favours: and to those who, by promises or threatnings, endeavour to influence their inferiors in such a cause. In the mean time, I dare say, it will be allowed, that any

* 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

any thing of this kind done by a minister himself, or at his direction, in his own favours, would be very wrong : And, blessed be God, it is at present among us considered as highly indecent and criminal.

I must also put you in mind of the great duty of family instruction and government. Heads of families must prepare their children and servants for receiving benefit by publick instruction, and endeavour by repetition to fix it in their minds. It is our duty to speak plainly, no doubt ; but it is impossible, preserving the dignity of the pulpit, to speak in such a manner as to be understood by those who have had no previous instruction in a familiar way. It is like casting seed upon an unopened, unprepared soil, which takes no root, and brings forth no fruit. Is it not hard, that, when many are so ready to find fault with every neglect of ministers, and sometimes expect more work from one, than ten can perform, they should take so little pains in their families, these smaller districts, which are committed to their own charge.

To conclude all, Strive together with your minister in your prayers to God for him. There is no way more effectual to prepare him for serving you in the gospel ; and there is no way more proper for preparing you to attend upon his ministry. If you make conscience of this duty, you will come to receive the answer of your prayers, and, indeed, to hear the word of God. Alas ! that there should be so few of our hearers of this charitable, sympathising kind. We have some stupid and insensible hearers, some proud and disdainful hearers, many criticising and censuring hearers, but few praying hearers. Let all that fear God give themselves to this duty. And, let them, not only remember that corner of God's vineyard in which their own lot is cast, but the kingdom of Christ in general ; and pray that his name may be great, *from the rising of the sun, unto his going down.* Amen.

F I N I S.

